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ABSTRACT

A four-part discussion on cultural sensitivity and good listening skills in development professionals is presented. It is noted that there is much in their educational regimen which militates against developing these habits of mind. It is hypothesized that much of this problem resides in the hidden cultural meanings of professionalism in general and that many of these hidden meanings remain unchallenged by educational curricula in development studies. Much can be done at the curricular level to suggest a notion of professionalism that encourages a thoroughgoing respect for alternate cultural viewpoints and the particular perspectives/aspirations of development professional's host community. The four parts of the presentation deal with the following topics: (1) professionalism as a hazardous occupation (outlining some of the inherent paternalistic overtones associated with the concept of professionalism and ways that these are reinforced by higher education); (2) pedagogical considerations in development education (exploring some of the pedagogical dimensions involved in developing the skills of cultural sensitivity and listening within students); (3) cross-disciplinary experiments and Eastern College's (Pennsylvania) Master of Business Administration program in Economic Development (offering a brief account of how the school is trying to address these issues within a graduate program and problems that have been encountered so far); and (4) travel seminars and cultural understanding (focusing on a work/study seminar that was recently organized for Eastern College students in Nicaragua). (SM)

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CREDITS AND CREDIBILITY:

EDUCATING PROFESSIONALS

FOR CULTURAL

SENSITIVITY

by

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and

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for

The Conference on Science and Technology for International Development

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INTRODUCTION

It is our thesis that there is much in the educational regimen of development professionals which militates against developing habits of cultural sensitivity and good "listening" skills. We argue that much of this problem resides in the hidden cultural meanings of "professionalism" in general and that many of these hidden meanings remain unchallenged by educational curricula in development studies. We contend, though, that much can be done at the curricular level to articulate a notion of professionalism which encourages a thoroughgoing respect for alternate cultural viewpoints and the particular perspectives/aspirations of development professional's host community.

The paper is organized in a four part presentation. The first part will outline some of the inherent paternalistic overtones associated with the concept of professionalism and ways that these are reinforced by higher education. The second part of the paper will explore some of the pedagogical dimensions involved in developing the skills of cultural sensitivity and listening within students. The third part will be devoted to a brief account of how we are trying to address these issues within a graduate program in economic development with which we are associated and the problems we have encountered thus far. The final portion of the paper will be devoted to a analysis of a travel seminar which was recently sponsored in Nicaragua. My colleague, Van Weigel, will handle the first and third parts of the presentation, and I will handle the second and final segments of the paper.

PART I: PROFESSIONALISM AS A HAZARDOUS OCCUPATION

For most of us, the ethos of professionalism has served us well. As "professionals" we have been able to secure a degree of respect and authority for our ideas and respective academic disciplines--a *prima facie* respect and authority which we would

not enjoy apart from our status as professionals. For most of us the imprimatur of professionalism is achieved through a mix of educational credentials, institutional affiliations, titles, publications and "professional" experience. Moreover, many of us draw a substantial amount of "professional" status and authority from the distinctive methodologies of our respective academic disciplines. We are "economists," "political scientists," "sociologists," "anthropologists," and so on; we enjoy all the rights and privileges associated with our respective tool boxes of methodological skills and specialized insights. In short, professionalism lives on because professionalism has served us well.

However professionalism is not without its costs. In particular, we suggest that professionalism is a hazardous occupation for those engaged in development work. Moreover, we contend that the substantial liabilities of professionalism are largely reinforced and remain unchallenged within most institutions of higher education. Specifically, we note the following shortcomings: (1) professionalism encourages expert-client relationships, (2) professionalism rewards literacy skills over listening skills, and (3) professionalism is typically biased in favor of specialization.

1. Professionalism encourages expert-client relationships. It goes without saying that substantive work in development--particularly at the grass roots level--cannot be accomplished without some real sense of partnership between the development practitioner and his or her host community. That partnership may be understood in terms of meaningful interaction between the practitioner and the host community or the real participation of beneficiaries in the design and implementation of programs instituted for their benefit. Anything short of a working partnership is likely to limit the effectiveness of most development programs.

Unfortunately, most concepts of professionalism engender an expert-client relationships which sanction paternalistic attitudes and power relationships, as well as short-circuit the process of conscientization within the host community. Because development professionals have been socialized to think that they have some special knowledge to impart, there is a tendency for host communities to be viewed as "target" communities and for expert-client attitudes to induce subtle forms of dependency that dampen self-initiative. While there will always be some kind of us/them dichotomy in development work, this dichotomy should not be sanctioned and exaggerated by the ethos of professionalism.

2. Professionalism rewards literacy skills over listening skills. Presumably all graduates from institutions of higher education have mastered, to some extent, basic skills in information acquisition and retrieval. Most of this data comes to us through written material as opposed to oral communications. Even when oral communications becomes a pronounced aspect of the learning event (e.g., a lecture or a seminar presentation), the emphasis is on either capturing oral expression in written expression (e.g., taking notes from a lecture) or expressing written expression in an oral context (e.g., reading a seminar paper). In such contexts, listening is simply a means to acquire and process a selected body of data which only becomes important when it is compartmentalized and translated in some written form. In short, oral skills ultimately become the handmaiden of writing skills, and the listening event treated only as means of data acquisition as opposed to being an art.

Yet, despite this pervasive socialization in higher education, presumably all of us recognize that listening is a kind of art form. To really listen--to capture and various moods and intonations of language, to be attentive to body language, to pick up on hidden assumptions and the like--is a skill which demands both energy and practice. Yet, typically, little or

nothing is done in the educational process to engender good listening skills. Obviously this becomes a major liability for development professionals, not only because listening is the primary communication channel for nonliterate or semi-literate individuals, but also because skillful listening habits carry significant cultural meanings which facilitate the development process (e.g., your opinion matters, you are a respected person).

3. Professionalism is typically biased in favor of specialization. It is indeed unfortunate that academics have responded to the information explosion within this century by emphasizing specialization over synthesis. Granted, there are significant tradeoffs between depth and breadth in any field of knowledge. Moreover, it would be impossible for any supra-disciplinary group of individuals to master the relevant fields of knowledge which touch on the practical dimensions of the development process and encompass the theoretical concerns of development studies. Yet, it goes without saying that the sort of fragmented, compartmentalized forms of academic inquiry which currently characterizes development studies would benefit more from synthesis than specialization. Sadly, though, generalists are in short supply and typically reside in the academic nether-world of interdisciplinary studies and the like.

One factor which intensifies the imbalance between specialization and synthesis is the tendency for development professionals to accord more respect to more quantitative, aggregative research methodologies than more intuitive methodologies (e.g., participant-observation).[1] This preference for the esoteric over the commonplace suits the institutional agenda of "professionalism" well; yet, unfortunately, much of the relevant data for development professionals can only be gathered through less analytical techniques.

In summary, we contend that one of the foremost challenges

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[1]Lawrence F. Salmen, Listen to the People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

of higher education is to articulate a concept of professionalism which truly empowers students to become facilitators and change agents in the development process. We can no longer afford notions of "professionalism" which encourage development professionals to view beneficiaries as clients instead of partners or emphasize literacy skills to the exclusion of art of listening. Moreover it seems clear that contemporary development professionals must be encouraged to place synthesis on par with specialization and to experiment with 'softer', more intuitive research methodologies which foster a genuine respect for persons and their cultural heritage. Yet, such enlightened concepts of professionalism will have little effect if they are transplanted into the traditional pedagogical framework of higher education. Hence, we cannot ignore the need for pedagogical reform in the education of development professionals. Presumably, without such pedagogical reform, our admonitions about cultural sensitivity and "listening to the people" will amount to more than little more than empty platitudes.

PART II: PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

As we are all aware, how a subject matter is taught is often more memorable, and in fact, more informative, than the subject matter itself. Therefore, this section will direct itself primarily to methodology, with a few suggestions for on-campus curricular offerings. (Off-campus curricular alternatives will be explored in parts III and IV.)

One of the most expansively revolutionary books of this century has no doubt been Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire is a Brazilian educator who was asked to work on a design for literacy education of adult persons, chiefly campesinos living in the mountains. His design was so successful in meeting the needs of these peasant farmers, not only for language skills, but for critical thinking skills and for the self-con-

fidence to express themselves honestly, that it was adopted by the Nicaraguan government shortly after the revolution in 1979. His pedagogy, as described in this book, is just what it portends to be, a pedagogy for the oppressed. What does that have to do with us in the First World? Does his pedagogy have anything to offer us in a culture where we assume we are free? My answer is a resounding "yes," in that I have spent 22 years in higher education and could give you innumerable examples of how far most of our students are from being truly free thinkers. And it is "yes" in terms of what such a pedagogy can teach us about teaching professionals how to work with persons more overtly oppressed then themselves.

Freire begins with a critique of traditional education, which he calls the "banking" method. Here the teacher possesses all of the "goods" and deposits them in the students' minds, from which they can be retrieved in kind. Thus, the values of the educator are transferred intact, and the student is "colonized." The truth is necessarily compromised because new ideas in the words of the "colonizer" are directionless.

Freire's pedagogy, on the other hand, was designed not to invest ideas in students' minds but to literate ideas taking shape there. It was designed to enable illiterate adults to think, read and write simultaneously by having them generate their own vocabulary. They would begin by discussing a picture of life as they experience it. Out of these discussions the teacher would extract key words, combine the consonants in these words with a whole range of vowels, have the learners sound out the new syllables and then create words from them. Thus campesinos, or peasants, were learning to read words which expressed their own consciousness of experience and, through this process, to begin to understand and articulate their own needs and plans. This kind of education or enlightenment is often referred to as conscientization--helping the poor and exploited "to become conscious of their situation."

How many of us have been victims of the "banking method" of education right here in a First World democracy? We have been lectured to and we lecture to our students or subordinates as if there was one answer to, one authoritative interpretation of, a whole host of very complicated issues. We have been colonized by or we colonize others with the TRUTH which we believe the teacher possesses, rather than recognizing that the truth is something each person relates to out of his or her context, and only has meaning in that contextual dialogue. As Freire distinctly points out, "In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teacher can manipulate the students because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (55).

How does it do this? First of all, it sees through "pseudo-participation" to "committed involvement." Committed involvement entails the difficult process of "authentic dialogue" which can only arise when each participant searches for the right words to say what he/she understands--the words that "fit" both with his/her perceptual context and with the present interpretive community. This requires patience and careful listening on the parts of all participants, because an insistence on linguistic homogeneity has been replaced by the importance of generative language. "Speaking the word, for Freire, is associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing, and ultimately participating in society's historical process. Thus speaking the word is closely related to transforming reality" (Pedagogy of the Non-poor,).

What is the job of the instructor in such an educational setting? The teacher presents some kind of "text" for the students to work with, whether it is a picture of women using a communal corn mill presented to illiterate farmers, or Van Weigel's A Unified Theory of Global Development, presented to a graduate seminar in economic development. Then he/she moderates a dialogic de-coding of that text, encouraging students to move

from abstract ideas to concrete applications, thus finding in the text a situation where they can both find themselves, together with other persons, and be questioned. At this point each participant is called to "re-consider," through the "considerations" of others, his\her own previous "consideration." "Thus the analysis of reality made by each individual de-coder sends them all back, dialogically, to the disjoined whole which once more becomes a totality evoking a new analysis by the investigators, following which a new evaluative and critical meeting will be held" (Freire 104).

Education of this type is dynamic, exciting, never-ending, and exhausting, but it is what we are called to do if we would liberate the thoughts forming in our students brains, rather than replacing them with our own, and if we want our students to learn how to listen and interact with others so that their self-discovery and self-development is paramount. In short, we can't teach humility through an exercise of arrogance, even if it is more efficient.

As far as offerings in the regular curriculum are concerned, each program in economic development needs to have a carefully designed sequence of courses, giving students as much latitude as possible to experiment with related fields. That might mean letting the students establish the "relationship." For example, I can well imagine a student in our MBA Economic Development Program petitioning to take a tutorial from the English department in Third World literature and making a case that would convince both Van and myself.

Beyond this, I think such programs need to pay particular attention to their language components. No student should graduate from a program in economic development who is not bi-lingual, even if his/her work in the field will require learning a new language. He/she should be bi-lingual not simply on a reading/writing level but on a conversational level as well. This requires ear-training and listening skills invaluable to all

aspects of his/her training. It also prepares the student to know what it feels like to be functionally illiterate and to break out of that silence through correctly applied language skills.

Finally, instructors in economic development need to work on the development of interdisciplinary courses, courses where professors from a variety of fields and perspectives, as well as students, engage in active dialogue and corporate problem solving. Once out of school, professionals in development are going to discover quickly that no decision related to community improvement is ever made in a vacuum. (Knowing that having animals in the kitchen causes multiple diseases, not to mention infestations of fleas, especially if the children do not have shoes or sufficient clothing to wear, is only significant to a community if they can afford to buy the supplies necessary to build doors on the kitchens. Even that presupposes that supplies are available and that someone both knows how to make doors and has the time to do so.) We do our students a grave disservice if we try to prepare them for collective decision-making through tidily compartmentalized courses and course outlines. Chaos is the crucible out of which new ideas arise, especially in cultures where chain-saw parts have to be fashioned out of tin cans. A realistic education in economic development may just need to be more purposefully conflictive.

PART III: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY EXPERIMENTS AND EASTERN COLLEGE'S MBA PROGRAM IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

For the remainder of the paper, Betsy and I would like to present some brief reflections concerning a graduate program in economic development with which we are associated. The first program we will discuss concerns the field education component of our MBA Program in Economic Development. The second program consists of a travel seminar which Betsy developed this past summer. We offer these reflections in an attempt to concretize some of what has been said in the first half of the paper. As

will be readily apparent, we feel that these experiences have underscored the challenge of educating development professionals for cultural sensitivity, and we recognize that a considerable amount of work remains to be done in making these educational experiences as beneficial as possible.

I will begin by discussing our MBA Program in Economic Development. Four years ago our school launched a new program in graduate business education which was designed to enable graduates to work on small business development and entrepreneurial support programs for low-income communities in both the United States and the Third World. As such, the central objective of the program is to enhance job creation within the "informal sector" and to stimulate new avenues for income generation within poor households. In its brief span of existence, the program has grown from 16 students to over 130, and approximately one-half of these students come from the developing world.

From its inception, our MBA Program in Economic Development has had a strong multidisciplinary orientation. Students are required to take courses not only in the traditional fields of business education at the graduate level (e.g., finance, marketing, accounting, economics, human resource management) but also in a variety of nontraditional fields such as anthropology, sociology, appropriate technology, small business entrepreneurship and theology. While certainly much remains to be done by way of integrating these traditional fields of business education with the nontraditional disciplines, the faculty teaching in this program have made considerable strides toward the attainment of a well-integrated, cross-disciplinary curriculum. A large share of this integration has been achieved by regularly scheduled round-table discussions which engage in the faculty in dialogue about a variety of concerns bearing on the subject of economic development.

However, the most thorough and intentional attempt at integration occurs in the context of our field education program.

The field internship takes place during the final semester of the student's course work. Although some students do their field internships in developing countries or in major metropolitan areas across the United States, most of the MBA students do their internship within the Greater Philadelphia Area. As such, these students work in a variety of capacities with community development corporations (CDCs) and churches which are sponsoring development initiatives relating to enterprise enhancement, commercial revitalization, housing and community development. For the duration of the semester, the students work 32 hours per week at their field placement and return to the campus every Friday for a joint faculty/student field education seminar.

As our Economic Development Program has evolved, the field education seminar has taken on special significance for both faculty and students in the program. The seminar is based on a serious of presentation in which the student is asked to reflect on the significance of certain topic areas (e.g., ethnography, marketing, finance, accounting, human resource management) as they relate to the internship. As such, students and faculty alike are forced to assess critically the relevance of certain aspects of the curriculum in relation to their practical work experience in development. Needless to say, this process of constructive dialogue not only helps students to synthesize various aspects of the curriculum and to apply their fund of knowledge creatively to an actual situation, but also forces the faculty to fine-tune aspects of the curriculum for the purpose of making courses as relevant and practical as possible.

One of the persistent criticisms we have received with our Philadelphia-based model for field education is that students are not exposed to a high degree of culture-shock. Many on the faculty, including myself, are very sympathetic to this criticism. Granted, some degree of cultural adjustment is usually required when white suburban students work within the inner city. Nonetheless, a considerably greater degree of cultural adjustment

is required by those who do their internships within developing countries.

While we recognize this shortcoming in our field education program, we have found that the primary obstacle facing our graduates does not concern their ability to endure culture-shock per se, but instead their capacity to engage in an extensive and critical "attitudinal reorientation" which opens the way for cultural sensitivity. Fortunately, both faculty and students alike have benefited from the perceptive contributions of our staff anthropologist, Dr. Carolyn Beck, who takes every opportunity to unveil the sort of ethnocentric assumptions and paternalistic presuppositions that often accompany discussions on development. (Interestingly, of all of the courses in our program, our graduates tell us that the cultural anthropology course was among the most helpful aspect of the curriculum.) Needless to say, the lively and critical dialogue which occurs during our faculty/student field education seminars is of tremendous value in exploring and promoting this attitude reorientation.

Overall, two attitudes have been most submerged and resistent to change: (1) the student seems him/herself more as a problem-solver who does something for someone than as a learner/facilitator; and (2) the student assumes that the resources for development or change must come from outside the community. In our estimation, both of these attitudes are strongly reinforced and nourished by the "banking approach" to education which Betsy mentioned in her discussion of Paulo Freire. Because students have been socialized to see education as the transfer of a commodity (i.e., knowledge) from the teacher to the student (instead of viewing education as the process of "lighting candles"), it is natural that they would assume that helping professionals are trained to solve problems for other people and that the resources for change and enlightenment must be brought to people instead of discovered within people.

PART IV: TRAVEL SEMINARS AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Travel/study courses arise out of a perceived need for students and faculty to have first-hand experiences in the Third World, including Third World portions of the First World. The course I am going to talk about took place last June and was entitled "Acompañamiento y Trabajo en Nicaragua" (Accompaniment and Work in Nicaragua). The idea for the course arose out of an experience that my husband, a former college professor who is now a woodworker, and I had the previous summer working in a refugee re-settlement project in the central region of Nicaragua. Proyecto Cristo Rey (Project of Christ the King), named after the local Catholic church parish, is a project designed to help settle war refugees in fifteen asentimientos (settlements) scattered between the towns of Paiwas and Rio Blanco. The government has given land to these refugees and put up the frames of 200 houses, but the project is responsible for the completion of the houses, for clean water systems, sanitation, health education, church organization, the building of schools and health centers, and the encouragement and support of agricultural projects and cottage industries. Special emphasis is placed on improvement of the quality of life for women.

The project is administered by a bi-lingual North American but employs more Nicaraguan than North American workers. It is supported by Bread for the World (European branch), Oxfam U.S.A., UNICEF, Catholic Relief Services, and other development agencies.

To us Proyecto Cristo Rey seemed a perfect environment for our MBA students in economic development to learn community-building from the bottom up. It also seemed to be a good environment in which they could learn about the role of the church in a revolutionary society (we are a religious college), and about the effects of war and economic embargo on already over-burdened Third World systems. Thus, our objectives for the course became: (1) to understand the concept of acompanamiento,

the accompaniment of the poor, in a theological framework; (2) to understand and apply the principles of appropriate technology within the context of Proyecto Cristo Rey; (3) to encounter and understand the complexities of organizing a development project in a culture where supplies are limited, where war intrudes on daily life, and where North Americans and indigenous persons are attempting to work side by side; and (4) to understand the complex roles of women in developing cultures and how their contributions to development can be maximized.

My husband and I were responsible for orienting the students, for getting them to Managua and for overseeing their needs once they were in the project. In Managua the students met with a variety of knowledgeable persons, including Gustavo Parajon, member of Nicargua's Commission of Reconciliation, an official from the Ministry of the Exterior, a Miskito Indian involved in the Autonomy Project for the east coast, and members of the Human Rights Office. At the project site, the students were under the tutelage of project personnel and a government water engineer who would involve them in the construction of a gravity water system. Each student was required to keep a journal reflecting on the required reading (historical, economic, and theological), the orientation lectures, seminars in the field, the work experience, and the cultural experience. It is from these journals that we have derived our sense of the need for greater emphasis on cultural sensitivity in the education of development professionals.

In spite of all of our discussions about the concept of accompaniment (walking with the poor in their journey), students still felt that their primary purpose was to do something for the Nicaraguan people. And they became quite distressed when they realized that the supplies we needed for the water system were not to be available the first day we were on the job. Patience is not a North American virtue! They had come to do a job; they only had three weeks to do it, and they wanted to dive in without

a lot of group meetings and negotiations for supplies.

When the work finally began, they were further surprised to find out that the altitude and heat eroded their energy considerably. They could not come close to working up to the Nicaraguans and felt guilty, as if they were not fulfilling their mission. It was very hard for them to receive the jokes that came in their direction, although they were meant in a lighthearted fashion, and did wonders for the villagers' sense of being the "teachers" in this joint endeavor. Females did not know what to do when Nicaraguan males would not let them work. They had <u>come</u> to work, "and wasn't the revolution about mutuality after all?!" It was hard for them to appreciate the difference between town rhetoric and country manners. They weren't used to the idea of taking a siesta, in spite of the fact that they had been up at dawn and worked until 12:00 in 95° weather, and plotted ways to work in more work hours.

But they learned. The proof of the pudding came the last day when we had set ourselves a goal for the number of pipes we would lay that day. The night before, an independent farmer invited us to spend our last day at his farm "playing" and all the people from the settlement agreed. They had been looking for a way to do something special. After about 20 minutes of agonized discussion of "What about the water project?" the class threw up their hands and agreed to be entertained. It was a truly liberating moment.

But work did not provide the only barrier. Students who could not speak Spanish found themselves speaking English at double volume in fruitless (and comic) efforts to be understood. One student wrote in his journal that he couldn't understand why somebody didn't just send the kids in the settlement shoes, thinking somehow that the health problems (primarily parasites) could be solved that simply. The same student refused to bathe in the river, saying he'd just take a shower when he got back to project headquarters on the weekend. (Whatever will he do when

he finds himself in a remote area for longer than a week?) They were constantly oversimplifying the political situation in Nicaragua (which is indeed labyrinthine) to save themselves the taxing job of recognizing that parts of it were tragically paradoxical and that the United States was, in part, responsible for the tragedy.

All of this is not to say that there was anything wrong with these students that isn't wrong with all of us. We would like the world to be explicable, changeable immediately where it is in arrears, and complementary to our own socialization. But it isn't. And all of the reading that we do in global studies and poverty issues, enlightening and inspiring as it is, cannot prepare us for what it is like to come face to face with other-ness.

It would seem to me that the biggest favor we can do for students who want to be professionals in development is to insist that they have at least one overseas experience in a Third World country and at least one indigenous experience in a Third World section of the First World, before they graduate. It is not enough. They will still find themselves making ethno-ignorant remarks and wondering where in the world they came from. But it is a start.

I feel confident that the students who went with us to Nicaragua are substantially different for having gone. One student who spoke no English at all discovered that he could entertain the children of the settlement all afternoon by showing them how to make animals from the clay at their feet. To watch the children imitate Paul, in posture as well as activity, was a wonderful lesson in non-verbal communication. Another student, a photographer, is still marveling at the beauty of the faces she caught. We've all become more involved in the political process through realizing how foreign policy in the First World affects the economic development of the Third World.

People often choose to go into the field of economic development because they have had an inspiring or "converting" concrete experience with the poor. To act productively on that experience usually requires that they become educated in the causes of poverty and techniques for its alleviation. Such education turns them into professionals, experts, people who are prepared to act. It can also remove them from the arena of action and allow a utilitarian naivete to develop alongside their expertise. Programs such as ours must fight against this, with all that we have.